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INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

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Introduction

1. At its fifty-fifth session, the Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1999/41 on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, referring, inter alia, to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action, emphasized that the goal of mainstreaming a gender perspective was to achieve gender equality and that that included ensuring that all United Nations activities integrate the human rights of women.

2. The Commission called upon all relevant actors to implement the agreed conclusions 1997/2 of the Economic and Social Council on mainstreaming the gender perspective as well as the agreed conclusions 1998/2 on follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. In line with paragraph 231 (g) of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Commission also called for further strengthening of cooperation and coordination between the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women and between the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in order to promote more effectively women's human rights.

3. The Commission also requested all human rights treaty bodies, special procedures and other human rights mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights regularly and systematically to take a gender perspective into account in the implementation of their mandates, and to include in their reports information on and qualitative analysis of human rights of women and girls, and encouraged the strengthening of cooperation and coordination in this regard.

4. The present report is submitted in accordance with Commission resolution 1999/41 and summarizes steps that have been taken to integrate gender perspectives fully into the United Nations human rights system. It updates the reports submitted in 1997, 1998 and 1999 on the same issue (E/CN.4/1997/40, E/CN.4/1998/49 and Add.1, and E/CN.4/1999/67 and Add.1). It deals with the concept of gender mainstreaming, and considers the various steps and initiatives taken by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, treaty monitoring bodies and human rights mechanisms, as well as the Commission on Human Rights, for that purpose.

I. MAINSTREAMING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

5. The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights instruments are all based on the fundamental principle of non-discrimination: everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in these instruments, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or status.

6. While the principle of non-discrimination is a widely accepted norm, some aspects of it have proved easier to implement than others. The elimination of discrimination on the ground of sex still remains far from being attained despite gains made in the field of human rights. The international community has recognized the inadequacy of measures taken for the promotion and protection of the human rights of women at the international level. As the extent of this

inadequacy becomes more apparent, measures to counter its effects are being undertaken. The guiding principle behind these efforts is mainstreaming gender perspectives, which was first formulated at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. The World Conference on Human Rights set as a priority for Governments and the United Nations the achievement of the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights.

7. Mainstreaming involves the placing of an issue within the pre-existing institutional, academic and discursive framework. It is the opposite of marginalization and, as such, is an appropriate way to characterize the objective of gender-perspective integration.

8. The aim of mainstreaming women's rights is to ensure that the inevitable social construction of men's and women's respective roles does not permit a discriminatory bias which subordinates women to men or places women in any kind of inferior position. Gender mainstreaming is thus the process of bringing an awareness of the status of women into the public arena. In the field of human rights, this primarily involves realizing that there is a gender dimension to every occurrence of a human rights violation. Secondarily, it involves increasing women's participation in the mechanisms dedicated to protecting and promoting human rights. Moreover, coordination and cooperation between the different parts of the United Nations system must be strengthened if mainstreaming is to have a lasting impact on the way human rights work is executed.

9. The integration of gender concerns was recommended at all recent global conferences, with a strong emphasis by the World Conference on Human Rights and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Fourth World Conference on Women reaffirmed that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and established a number of specific strategic objectives to ensure that women enjoy their full human rights. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action restated and forcefully encouraged gender-sensitive analyses of human rights activity.

10. As stated in the United Nations system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women 1996-2001, which was submitted to the Economic and Social Council and endorsed in Council resolution 1996/34, a great number of organizations in the United Nations system committed themselves to promote and to advocate women's full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and to advocate in particular the rights-based approach to the advancement of women in such areas as employment, education, violence against women and health and reproductive rights, as well as in the development activities.

11. The important challenge today is for the international human rights system to take gender fully into account in the development and application of norms and procedures so that violations against women and girls are clearly identified and the protection offered under the law is adequate and equitable.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

12. This section gives a brief overview of the various recent steps and initiatives undertaken by OHCHR in mainstreaming a gender perspective.

13. OHCHR has finalized a policy statement on gender mainstreaming and women's human rights. As part of the OHCHR Mission, Aims and Strategic Objectives for 1999-2001, a work plan on gender and the human rights of women has been prepared. The work plan emphasizes the development of an internal capacity on gender and the human rights of women.

14. OHCHR has intensified its efforts, in coordination with DAW, to integrate a gender perspective in all human rights activities and to help ensure that the human rights of women are included as an important element of all activities of the system, in line with the agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system adopted by the Economic and Social Council.

15. Cooperation between DAW and OHCHR is being maintained. In that regard, a joint work plan for the Division and the Office has been agreed and submitted to both the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights.

16. As a follow-up to agreed conclusions 1997/2, as well as to several other recommendations of expert group meetings on the integration of a gender perspective into United Nations human rights activities and programmes, such as the one organized by the then Centre for Human Rights, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 1995 and the round table of human rights treaty bodies on human rights approaches to women's health, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, convened by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), DAW and the then High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights in 1996, and to resolution 1998/51 of the Commission on Human Rights on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, OHCHR, DAW and UNIFEM organized a three-day workshop on gender mainstreaming for special rapporteurs and Chairs of treaty bodies. The workshop, which was part of the 1999 joint DAW-OHCHR work plan, was intended to build on the work done so far, to identify progress made and obstacles encountered, and to develop specific strategies for further action. It was held from 26 to 28 May 1999 in Geneva.

17. The workshop covered a wide range of issues. Sources of information available to independent experts, the particularities of the different mandates, issues of normative clarity and consistency, and cooperation and coordination were identified as areas where further progress needed to be made in order to achieve the goals set at United Nations conferences and reiterated in resolutions of intergovernmental bodies. The participants also pointed to the importance of the political and cultural environment within which women pursued the full enjoyment of their human rights, and of the institutional framework and capacity for ensuring respect for, and protection, promotion and fulfilment of women's human rights. It was also stressed that the various actors responsible for progress on women's rights issues should be accountable to their respective constituencies.

18. The workshop emphasized the need regularly and systematically to take the gender perspective into account in the implementation of the mandates and to include in the reports information on, and qualitative analysis of violations of human rights of women and girls; it encouraged the strengthening of cooperation and coordination in this regard. The workshop also adopted recommendations on the sources of information and methods of work of the treaty bodies and the special procedures.

19. In 1999, the international community commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was felt that this anniversary provided an opportunity for the United Nations to review the achievements and remaining challenges with respect to guaranteeing the human rights of women. The status of implementation of the Convention was reviewed. In that regard, and as a follow-up to the special debate on gender mainstreaming and human rights of women which was held during the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights (1998), OHCHR, in cooperation with DAW, organized a panel discussion, in the framework of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission (1999), celebrating the anniversary.

20. The panel discussion aimed at reinforcing the working relations between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and also at strengthening coordination between the activities of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights. The celebration of the anniversary in the framework of the Commission on Human Rights allowed a connection to be established between human rights treaty monitoring bodies and the main intergovernmental human rights body. Moreover, the holding of the panel discussion allowed for a review of the status of implementation of the Convention in the context of the adoption of the Optional Protocol.

21. The panel was held on 13 April 1999. The panel speakers were the Chairpersons of the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women, a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women. The panel was moderated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. It addressed the specific issues of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention and the integration of gender in the agenda of the Commission on Human Rights. All the panelists welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol and called upon all States to ratify the Convention and to withdraw their reservations to it. It was judged premature to assess the impact of the new agenda item on the integration of the human rights of women and gender mainstreaming on the activities of the Commission on Human Rights.

22. Since 1997, OHCHR has been implementing a project, developed together with DAW, to integrate gender into its technical cooperation programme. The project was initiated after a review by a consultant of the technical cooperation programme from a gender perspective. In March 1998, the consultant's findings were reviewed by a meeting of experts and representatives of DAW, UNIFEM, UNFPA and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The meeting recommended future action, which is currently being implemented under the project. To strengthen the technical cooperation programme, the project is aimed at creating gender guidelines on core technical cooperation activities for OHCHR staff and consultants. In 1998 guidelines on gender and the rights of women in the preparation and execution of seminars and

training activities were developed while throughout 1999, guidelines for project formulation and evaluation missions were prepared. The latter are currently being reviewed by OHCHR. Recognizing the interrelationship between the realization of the rights of women and economic, social and cultural rights, efforts are under way to merge the gender guidelines with guidelines on integrating economic, social and cultural rights into technical cooperation activities. It is expected that the final package will provide comprehensive guidance to improve the methodology of the technical cooperation programme.

23. In the field, OHCHR has stepped up efforts to focus activities on the rights of women and integrate the gender perspective, in accordance with the Mission, Aims and Strategic Projects for 1999-2001. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OHCHR field office, on behalf of the Steering Board of the Office of the High Representative, established the Gender Coordinating Group (GCG) to integrate gender in the programming of the international community, Governments and non-governmental organizations. In collaboration with several agencies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), GCG is the first attempt to integrate gender in a peacekeeping mission and to secure inter-agency cooperation framed in the terms of the Beijing Platform for Action. During 1999, GCG considered issues such as trafficking and protection of the rights of those forced into prostitution, ensuring a gender perspective in draft legislation, and the creation of a gender task force in the Stability Pact. At the same time, the OHCHR initiated a pilot project with the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) to train social workers, police officers, legal professionals, medical professionals and NGO representatives on mechanisms to prevent, minimize and punish violence against women.

24. Similarly, in Guatemala the OHCHR field office has been participating in the Inter-agency Group on Gender and Advancement of Women to pave the way for gender integration in programmes and activities of United Nations agencies. In addition, it has addressed specific issues such as violence against women and the rights of indigenous people, in collaboration with governmental and other partners. The OHCHR gender adviser in El Salvador continued to ensure the integration of gender and the rights of women into technical cooperation activities, including review of draft legislation, training for police and prison officers, and development of training materials.

25. In Palestine, gender and women's rights' issues are both integrated in all components of the OHCHR technical cooperation programme, and the focus of specific activities. Technical and financial assistance is being provided to a Gaza-based NGO, Mashraqiyat, in the context of OHCHR support to the Palestinian Authority and institutions for the establishment of a legal framework consistent with human rights standards. On the basis of an agreement with OHCHR, Mashraqiyat has conducted legal research and public consultations on upcoming legislation on personal status and family law, with a view to making recommendations to the Palestinian legislators based on international standards on the human rights of women. This activity - which was completed in 1999 - has also involved a regional dimension, drawing on expertise from other Arab countries in addressing the question of how to address Shariah law and international

legal standards on a comparative and mutually supportive basis. The results of Mashraqiyat's work include formal recommendations presented to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Legislative Council.

26. The OHCHR-assisted process of developing a Palestinian National Plan of Action on Human Rights (NPAHR) has ensured that human rights standards relating to women and gender are integrated into each sector in the current NPAHR framework. Governmental and non-governmental organizations dealing with the promotion and protection of the human rights of women are active participants in the Sectoral Working Groups which are responsible for formulating the six sectoral plans to be part of the NPAHR.

27. In the area of the administration of justice, all training curricula and programmes for law enforcement and security forces, prison staff and judges, prosecutors and lawyers include sessions on the human rights of women in the administration of justice. A major aspect of the OHCHR programme is training of the Palestinian Police Force (PPF). An integral component of the curriculum is women and policing, covering women as law enforcement professionals, as victims of crime and abuse, and as offenders. Issues such as gender balance in the PPF and equality of opportunity for women police, effective response by law enforcement officials to instances of violence against women, including domestic violence, and the social and cultural challenges associated with these issues are regularly discussed in OHCHR training programmes. Members of local organizations dealing with women's issues often participate as resource persons in OHCHR training programmes, in order to facilitate the establishment of channels of communication and cooperation with the law enforcement agencies.

28. Based on a similar initiative in the Gaza Strip, which was successfully completed in 1998, OHCHR is providing direct support to a Jerusalem-based NGO for the establishment of a Women's Unit. The project has started in 1999 and will be completed in the year 2000. The Women's Unit will focus on the promotion of the human rights of women through activities such as legal aid, counselling and representation, research, studies and policy development, and education and technical assistance for communities and individuals. The Unit is initially concentrating on labour issues with a view to developing recommendations for policy and legislation.

29. OHCHR also continues to participate in the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality which meets to coordinate gender-related work among United Nations development programmes, identify gaps, and provide assistance in mainstreaming women in development/gender and development (WID/GAD) into United Nations programmes in Palestine.

30. All training activities carried out under the OHCHR technical cooperation programme continue to include sessions on the human rights of women, with a specific focus on concerns relevant to each professional group addressed by the training - judges, police officers, members of non-governmental organizations, government officials, military, peacekeeping personnel, human rights monitors and others. Various such courses were carried out in 1999 in Cambodia, El Salvador, Nepal, Palestine, South Africa, Italy and Switzerland.

31. On the occasion of the second meeting of OHCHR field presences, held in Geneva in September 1999, OHCHR provided a half-day session on gender and gender mainstreaming. The meeting gathered representatives of 27 field presences with both monitoring and technical cooperation functions. The session addressed key concepts and definitions, as well as the application of gender analysis to OHCHR activities. Participants relayed successful experiences and possible models for gender mainstreaming based on their work. Obstacles and constraints were also discussed.

32. OHCHR has recently become actively involved in the issue of trafficking in persons with a special focus on trafficking in women and children. In early 1999 the High Commissioner made public her decision to give high priority to the issue of trafficking. Concrete steps - including the allocation of additional human and financial resources - have been taken to implement this decision. OHCHR action in the area of trafficking is currently taking place on two fronts. Firstly, the Office continues to enhance the quality of its support to the relevant mechanisms dealing with trafficking and related issues. On a second front, OHCHR has developed a specific anti-trafficking programme. The programme focuses particularly on legal and policy reform and undertakes a range of catalytic activities and interventions aimed at ensuring the integration of a human rights perspective into national, regional and international anti-trafficking initiatives. OHCHR work in the area of trafficking is based on two fundamental principles: first, that human rights must be at the core of any credible anti-trafficking strategy; and second, that such strategies must be developed and implemented from the perspective of those who most need to have their human rights protected and promoted. Additional information on OHCHR's work in this area is contained in the specific report on this issue submitted to the Commission at its present session (E/CN.4/2000/66).

III. STEPS TAKEN BY HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES AND BY HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS AND PROCEDURES

A. Human rights treaty bodies

33. With regard to steps taken by the various human rights treaty bodies, a more comprehensive list of activities, as well as an assessment of activities were included in the reports submitted to the Commission at its fifty-third, fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions (E/CN.4/1997/40, E/CN.4/1998/49 and Add.1 and E/CN.4/1999/67). It should be noted that except for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, no new developments occurred regarding gender integration in the activities of treaty monitoring bodies.

1. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

34. In August 1999, the Committee revised its reporting guidelines with regard to article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. One of the reasons for the revision was to emphasize the need for the inclusion of information on women in States parties' reports in order for the Committee to be able to assess whether racial discrimination has an impact upon women different from that upon men.

2. Participation of women in human rights treaty bodies

35. The composition of the bodies established under the international human rights instruments must be considered as an indicator of the advancement of women within the United Nations system. There is no woman member of the Committee against Torture. On the other hand, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is composed solely of women. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has 2 women among its 18 members. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is composed of 18 members of whom 3 are women. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has 7 women among its 10 members and the Human Rights Committee has 4 women among its 18 members, both these committees are chaired by women.

B. Human rights mechanisms and procedures

36. The special procedures mechanisms have also been encouraged to integrate a gender perspective into their work. Each year, resolutions adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council have encouraged and requested the special rapporteurs/representatives, experts and working groups to include in their reports gender-disaggregated data, to address the characteristics and practices of human rights violations that are specifically or primarily directed against women or to which women are particularly vulnerable, and to enhance cooperation and exchange information among themselves and with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

37. This process is an ongoing one. A number of special procedures are making significant progress and others require additional support and guidance in this area. Some - but not all - of the special procedures have been specifically requested by the Commission on Human Rights to ensure that gender considerations are fully reflected in their work.

38. The special rapporteurs have tended increasingly to examine the question of the enjoyment by women of their rights. While they do not all give this matter equal attention or importance, because reports are not gender specific, information not disaggregated by sex, or because of a lack of understanding of the relevance of gender, it is interesting to note that there is an encouraging trend towards integrating women's rights into the study of many subjects. Further efforts need to be made, of course, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has a role to play in this regard.

39. A number of special procedures mechanisms have considered in their reports the enjoyment by women of their rights and discrimination based on gender. They have either included a specific section on women or have identified specific issues which have a particular impact on women's enjoyment of their rights.

40. In examining the reports submitted in 1999 by some of the special rapporteurs, both country rapporteurs and thematic rapporteurs, common concerns and conclusions can be drawn. Most of the special rapporteurs referred to gender-based human rights violations with regard to equal access to education, literacy, access to health services, access to property, access to loans,

the right to inherit, and participation in the decision-making processes, as well as the persistence of harmful traditional practices. The problem most often mentioned in the reports is gender-based violence. Women are used as targets in various types of conflicts and in various types of violence. Women are raped, sexually abused, beaten, tortured and killed. Rape is more and more being used as a tactic of war. The particular situation of women widowed by war has been drawn to the attention of various special rapporteurs. Widows are especially vulnerable with regard to their physical safety, the difficulties of replacing lost identity documents, their mobility, their rights to inherit and to have access to land and property, obstacles to their remarriage, the suffering of consequences for the political views of their male relatives. Widows often lose the protection of their husbands and their social status and have to take responsibility for the entire family. Most of the special rapporteurs also mentioned the issue of violence against women in and outside the family. This violence reflects the low status of women in the societies concerned and their particular vulnerability.

41. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for human rights in Cambodia noted that the low level of representation of women in public life constitutes in itself an obstacle to tackling social problems which have a particular bearing on women. He again expressed concern about women's health issues, particularly with regard to reproductive health, in particular of ethnic minority women. The health of ethnic minority women is undermined by multiple factors: lack of access to health services in the sparsely populated areas where they live, cultural and language barriers to effective contact with health staff, inadequate sanitation and nutrition, and low levels of education and information. The economic participation of women is another concern of the Special Representative. Their participation in the labour force is constrained both by their generally inferior educational status and by what appears to be discrimination against them. Women with the same qualifications as men, whether in the private sector or in the public service, are routinely paid less, receive fewer benefits and do not have the same opportunities for promotion. When wage rates are compared for six major occupational groups, and controlled for differences in experience and education, women's earnings are lower than those of men by about 36 per cent (see E/CN.4/1999/101).

42. The independent expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia noted that gender discrimination is deeply rooted in Somali society. Rape, which was uncommon in Somalia before the war, has become a weapon of war for the militia and bandits, as well as in camps for displaced persons and returnees. Women belonging to minority groups, such as the Bantus and the Rahanweyn, are particularly subject to these crimes. More than 95 per cent of Somali women undergo female genital mutilation, approximately 90 per cent of them suffering the most severe form. It seems that younger women are more hesitant about the practice, while the older generation of women often support it even more than men (see E/CN.4/1999/103).

43. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, in referring to the displacement of populations, noted the particular vulnerability of women and children. The Special Rapporteur has noted the serious psychological problems facing women and children affected by the crisis. Abuses against women, especially in the course of violent events, reportedly ranged from having seen their children or husband killed to being raped and losing

their homes and means of subsistence. Interviews held in the course of a short visit to a village revealed that many women had suffered such abuses. It should be mentioned that cultural inhibitions linked to subjects such as sex and the serious social implications of rape and assaults on women compound the problem of lack of outlets for expression and foment deep hatreds. Female-headed households were less able to become self-reliant and were therefore more in need of assistance. In some cases, they were assisted by other families, for example, in setting up shelters (see E/CN.4/1999/35).

44. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Nigeria noted that even though Nigeria had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1989, its implementation had not effectively taken place before the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. One of the steps taken by the Government of Nigeria in this regard had been to carry out a national baseline survey of harmful traditional practices (HTPs) with a view to providing relevant and accurate data for the development of national, state and local plans of action. HTPs are traditional, cultural and religious practices handed down through succeeding generations which are often detrimental to the health and psychological and social well-being of women and girls. These practices also violate personal fundamental human rights of the girl children or women concerned. HTPs include female genital mutilation, early marriage and the attendant harmful consequences of early pregnancies, widowhood practices, discriminatory inheritance and property laws, bride price, betrothal rights, parental consent, discriminatory divorce laws, lack of contractual capacity, wife battering, male child preference, and unequal access to education and health care. Regrettably, these practices operate in parallel to international provisions for the protection of women's rights. Moreover, about 52 per cent of Nigerian women live below the poverty line while 70 per cent of women live and work in the rural areas, mostly contributing to the domestic economy as farmers, petty traders, domestic workers and homemakers. Their work is unrecognized and unrewarded. Community lending banks frequently disburse loans to women only through their husbands. Women's access to credit is restricted by low income, lack of collateral or property, illiteracy and institutionalized discrimination and stereotyping. The Government has done little to abrogate these discriminatory practices (see E/CN.4/1999/36).

45. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan has noted that although the new Constitution contains some provisions for the equal rights of women with men there were still discriminatory legislation and practices. The attention of the Special Rapporteur was particularly drawn to the situation of the large number of women widowed by the war and separated from their children, who had been abducted during raids or forcibly conscripted. In some cases their children had died of hunger or they had to give them away to save them from that fate. The Special Rapporteur was very impressed with the work undertaken by the Government-sponsored Sudan National Committee on Traditional Practices, officially established in 1988 with the objective of eradicating harmful practices endangering the health of women and children, chief among them female genital mutilation (see E/CN.4/1999/38/Add.1).

46. The Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty noted that poverty hits women especially hard and leads to serious violations of their rights. Extreme poverty can be linked with prostitution and with the exploitation, both sexual and physical (forced labour), of young girls from very poor backgrounds (prostitution and slavery rings). Unemployment and illiteracy are also particular problems for women (see E/CN.4/1999/48).

47. In his report, the Special Rapporteur on the effect of structural adjustment policies on the full enjoyment of human rights stated that among the segment of the population affected negatively by the structural adjustments policies (SAPs) are women. Women and men feel the effects of SAPs in a variety of ways: increases in the price of food, declines in real family incomes and reductions in social and health services. These directly affect women's role as principal homemakers. There has been an increase in female-headed families in many developing countries undergoing adjustment policies where men are obliged to migrate in search of jobs (see E/CN.4/1990/50).

48. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has drawn the attention of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers to the problem of so-called "honour killings", which are reported to take place in some countries of the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia, whereby husbands, fathers or brothers have gone unpunished after having murdered their wives, daughters or sisters in order to defend the honour of the family. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has been informed that men who commit "honour killings" normally receive considerably shorter sentences, as the courts view defence of the honour of the family as a mitigating circumstance (see E/CN.4/1999/39).

49. Central to the issues of equal access for women to rights, equal opportunities for the enjoyment of rights and equal treatment in that enjoyment is the actual extent to which women may exercise their rights to freedom of opinion, expression and information without discrimination and the degree to which women actually enjoy the right to participate in public life. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression stated again that the problem did not lie in the manner in which international human rights standards have been elaborated but rather in the restrictive and traditional interpretations and applications of human rights law. The Special Rapporteur emphasized that it was not acceptable for women still to be dependent on men to represent their views and protect their interests, nor was it acceptable that women continue to be consistently excluded from decision-making processes that not only affect them but society in general. The Special Rapporteur remained convinced that any real consideration of how to ensure the realization of all human rights for all women necessarily includes consideration of the rights to opinion, expression, participation, information, association and assembly. The Special Rapporteur attaches considerable importance and priority to the question of the link between freedom of opinion and expression and the elimination of discrimination and violence against women (see E/CN.4/1999/64).

IV. ACTION TAKEN BY THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

50. At its fifty-fifth session, the Commission on Human Rights adopted resolutions relating to traffic in women and girls (1999/40), integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system (1999/41) and the elimination of violence against women (1999/42).

51. In other resolutions, including those on migrants, torture, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, enforced or involuntary disappearances, racism, the right to food, freedom

of opinion and expression, the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and the rights of the child, the Commission made specific reference to gender-mainstreaming and/or violations of the human rights of women and called for measures to combat these problems.

52. Also at its fifty-fifth session, the Commission voiced particular concern regarding violations of women's rights in specific countries, including Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Sudan, Rwanda and Equatorial Guinea.

V. ACTIVITIES OF UNITED NATIONS BODIES AND SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

53. The information presented in this section is not exhaustive. Relying on information submitted by the agencies, it attempts to give a brief overview of the rising concern of some agencies for the special protection and promotion of the human rights of women.

A. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

54. From 5 to 7 October 1998, a workshop on a rights-based approach to women's empowerment and advancement and gender equality organized by DAW was held at FAO headquarters. The workshop brought together members of the United Nations Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and the Working Party on Gender Equality of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC). Discussions focused on reviewing and clarifying the rights-based approach to gender equality and its implications for the policy and operations of bilateral and multilateral entities. The workshop also contributed to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a follow-up to the workshop, FAO held a High-Level Consultation on Rural Women and Information from 4 to 6 October 1999 with the aim to facilitate - at the international policy-making and technical level - an exchange of views on the value of information as a decision-making and operational tool to support the role of rural women in agricultural and rural development.

55. Moreover, FAO, at the invitation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, submitted reports regarding the implementation of the Convention in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Nigeria, the Republic of Korea, Peru, the United Republic of Tanzania, Panama and Slovakia.

B. United Nations Population Fund

56. In its Mission Statement, UNFPA stresses the universality and indivisibility of human rights, focusing on the sexual and reproductive rights of women and men and on the promotion of gender equality, equity and empowerment of women. In line with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, special attention is given to a rights-based approach to population and development with a focus on meeting the needs and rights of the individual, in particular women and girls, rather than on meeting demographic targets alone.

57. Within the context of population and sustainable development, UNFPA has underscored that legal systems must protect and enforce women's rights, and that all forms of discrimination and violence against women must be eliminated. The application of a human rights framework to the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, is particularly essential, owing to the close links between a woman's sexual and reproductive health and status, and the way she is valued in society.

58. The "ICPD+5" review process has illustrated the extent to which women's human rights have been integrated into population programmes, projects and activities. Many countries have made progress in implementing a human rights approach to reproductive health, outlawing harmful traditional practices against girls and women such as female genital mutilation and addressing adolescent reproductive health issues, including girls' education and protection against early marriage.

59. The review process also made clear that in many ways, the reproductive and sexual rights of women are still under threat and that violence against women is still endemic in some regions. Women in developing countries are still in need of basic reproductive health information and services - and providing this is a human rights challenge that all elements of the United Nations system face jointly. On the basis of the "Key Actions for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action of the ICPD", UNFPA will continue to work with Governments, civil society groups and United Nations partners to promote the entire spectrum of women's human rights, with particular attention to sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

C. World Food Programme

60. The primary mandate of WFP is to provide food to the hungry poor. In doing so, it ensures that women have appropriate and equal access to food. In fact, WFP gives women in relief situations access to 80 per cent of the food, knowing that they will use it to feed their families. WFP insists on equal funding for boys' and girls' education. It also encourages women's participation in its food-for-work programmes, so that they benefit from both the short- and long-term benefits of the activities. Moreover, it insists that women take a leading role in the management of its food aid so that they learn leadership skills, have a voice in decision-making, and have their strategic needs met.

61. WFP prepared a paper on women's rights to food, which was presented at the Workshop on the Rights-Based Approach to Women's Empowerment and Advancement and Gender Equality. The paper stated that women are a key part of the right to food because they shoulder a major share of the responsibilities for household food security, they are more likely to spend income on food for the family, and they are more apt to ensure that their children get proper nutrition.

62. WFP has a set of Commitments to Women which mandate that women should have priority access to food in both emergency situations and development. In addition, women are expected to be included in food management and decision-making, as already mentioned. They will only have their strategic needs met, as well as their practical needs, if they are empowered to exercise their rights.

63. This perspective has recently been expanded more forcefully into the emergency arena, where gender differences have usually been ignored in situations of crisis. WFP was instrumental, as co-Chair with UNICEF of an Inter-Agency Standing Committee Sub-Group on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance, in drafting a policy statement which has been endorsed by the IASC. It supports the principles of gender equality, equal protection of human rights of women and men, equal representation of women in peace mediation and decision-making, and integration of a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance, amongst others.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

64. All Governments should ratify, without reservations, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Action should be taken to change existing or introduce new legislation in order to ensure the protection of the human rights of women and to acknowledge the principle of gender equality as the basis for laws and practices which will promote women's concerns. States should regularly review reservations with a view to withdrawing them.

65. The obligations of States to prevent and redress violations of women's rights need to be further clarified. Women's different life experiences, both in private and in public life, such as in employment, education and political life, should be assessed more explicitly in order to identify obstacles to the enjoyment of their rights. In this regard, treaty bodies have an opportunity to clarify States parties' obligations to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of all. Specific recommendations were included in the report on this subject submitted to the last session of the Commission (E/CN.4/1999/67).

66. The report of the expert group meeting on the development of guidelines for the integration of gender perspectives into human rights activities and programmes held in 1995 contains a wide range of recommendations (see E/CN.4/1996/105, para. 71). As the present report shows, progress in implementing those recommendations has been made. However, many of them are still relevant; those are therefore reproduced below (updated to reflect changes in the United Nations structure):

> "1. The language used in the formulation of new human rights instruments and standards and in existing standards should be gender inclusive. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should establish a guideline on gender inclusivity in all the official languages of the United Nations, for use in the preparation of all its communications, reports and publications. The Commission on Human Rights, its Sub-Commission and the various human rights mechanisms referred to above should also strive to ensure that the language used in reports and resolutions is gender inclusive.
>
> "2. All entities charged with the protection and promotion of human rights, including United Nations human rights bodies, Governments and other international institutions, should identify, collect and use gender-disaggregated data in their communications and apply gender analysis to monitoring and reporting.

"3. Because effective integration of women's human rights within the United Nations requires creative and comprehensive gender analysis of information as well as a gender-sensitive interpretation of all human rights mechanisms, all bodies are called upon to revise their working methods to incorporate such an approach.

"4. An evaluation of all information and training materials published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should be undertaken from a gender-sensitive perspective and revisions made where necessary. The Fact Sheet series, the Professional Training series and the Manual on Human Rights Reporting should be considered priorities for such review. Consideration should be given to the development of information materials on gender perspectives and on strategies for ensuring the integration of the human rights of women into United Nations system-wide activities and programmes.

"5. The importance of education cannot be overemphasized. In relation to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, steps should be taken to ensure that all Decade-related activities are gender sensitive; there must also be special attention paid to women's human rights and to teaching women about their human rights.

"6. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should provide more accessible information about current activities such as on-site field visits, treaty reporting schedules, etc. so that all NGOs, and especially women's NGOs, can provide greater input and become more involved in the human rights work of the United Nations. More aggressive steps to disseminate this information could include media outreach, when appropriate to the mandate of the activity, using such means as radio, popular newspapers, etc.

"7. All management officials and staff members of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other personnel involved in United Nations human rights activities should receive training in recognition of the human rights of women and in the application of gender-sensitive perspectives to the promotion and protection of the human rights of women.

"...

"9. The High Commissioner for Human Rights should provide system-wide coordination and collaboration on the human rights of women within the United Nations. This includes promoting a gender perspective on the human rights aspects of, inter alia, peacekeeping and monitoring the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, humanitarian assistance (the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), refugees (UNHCR), development (UNDP), economic policy and planning (IMF, World Bank), reproductive health services (UNFPA), labour (ILO) and education (UNESCO).

"10. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should cooperate and collaborate in efforts to mainstream women's human rights with the women-specific bodies of the United Nations system: the Commission on the Status of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women, CEDAW, UNIFEM, INSTRAW.

"11. United Nations bodies and States parties must take steps to ensure equal representation of women and men, as well as gender-trained individuals, on the committees of experts that monitor the implementation of treaties, as well as among the independent experts and working groups of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights."